~~XXXXXXXX~~ PAULA BIREN

BOBINE 351
PANAMA CITY BIREN 1

Q: ...We didn't start yet. I just want to.....(unclear).....to lose your control.
Okay, let's start. I think we...we have to start from the beginning, from the entrance of the Germans in...in Lodz. You can describe, what was the situation, what were your feelings at the time, and if you knew already what would be at stake, that some of you had an idea.

A: Oh, we had an idea, but that was not of how it would happen. We didn't have an idea how bad.
The war broke out September first 1939, and we knew that it was coming, but it was a surprise anyway when the news came that Germany invaded Poland. And we were getting ready as a matter of fact for the invasion that summer.
And we had preparations, military preparations, learning how to

Q: I asked how old were you at the time?

A: 17. 17. Just 17 in April, when we knew already something is coming and ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~beginningx we were digging in the city anti panzer....

Q: ditches.

A: ....ditches. So, we knew it's coming. But nevertheless, when it came, it was a surprise.

Q: And Lodz was a...taken when;

A: within a week....the Germans were in Lodz
So they were in Lodz

There was not much bombing, maybe cover bombs and there was not much physical destruction. But we were readying. We were...I was for instance active in the block service. We would make rounds, we would get ready to...to help people, get news from block to block. We would go...in the air raids that they should go downstairs and hide. It was panic. It was an unknown panic...that something just was going to happen and all that. But the surprise was that...how quickly the Germans came. Because in no time the country was bombed, under siege. We hoped....Our hope was that England and France would step in bedause Poland had a pact with both countries...

Q: Yes...

A: And we were waiting from day to day, and nothing was happening. And before anything happened, it was gone.

Q: And did you fear already that the fate of the Jews would be what happened later, what was...

A: well, we...we had a...a good idea because we listened to the radio and...the Hitler speeches in Germany and we took him very seriously. We knew what was happening there, in Germany, for a number of years. We just hoped that it...at that point we were not involved with that Jews were already were having a hard time and the anti-Semitism was dated even before then. And in the four....in thirty nine. So...and we knew also...See, Lodz was a city where...there was a large...part of the population were Germans. It was partly settled by the Germans. So we knew the , we knew the...our play-mates....Germans...Volksdeutsche, getting ready and wearing swastikas before Hitler came in. And we were watching them, sort of hoping that we can settle them down if there...if there is no invasion. So that within no time it was quiet. You know, sort of a dead silence, when the invasion came...Suddenly a surprise, overnight overrun. And there was a feeling that sort of that...caught by surprise.

Q: Yes.

A: And then the arrival of dead silence, because the army...the Ger... We knew it's over, the country capitulated, but it took a while for the German army to come in. So they came and there was still not much fearing, they came, they stayed there, they were going to the east and...we felt that we are trapped, because our neighbours, our Polish neighbours started really to let us know that our time is over. And that was a surprise. A surprise, and not a surprise. Because we knew what was stirring. The hate from the Polish population...

Q: It started immediately, as soon as the Germans entered the town.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you give some examples?

A: Eh....

Q: First of all...

A: I think one thing that happened was that as they settled somehow, the Germans, that decrees were coming out about...first, I mean Jews being different. And, the same decrees they had in Germany

they applied to Poland: that there...we...we were to be considered as dangerous, different, nothing, and special, we would be taken care in a special way, different than the Poles.

Q: Yes, and what was the reaction of the Poles to...to the decrees, because ~~that~~ it came very quickly.

A: The reaction was...Let me think how it was...in my neighbourhood.

Q: You were living in a Jewish neighbourhood?

A: No, I lived in a mixed neighbourhood. There was a great number of.. An appartment house that belonged to my grandfather. There were a good number of Poles.

Q: You were from a rich family?

A: Well, not really. My grandfather was before the first World War he was a prominent, you may say rich. He was a builder and he built many houses, appartment buildings in Lod... And then, when the war came, he lost it all with the devaluation of money and all t at. It was practic loss...he still had some money, but the economy was shattered after the First World War. And so he wasn't that affluent, my mother's family was not as affluent as they x used to be. So it was a struggle, but I never felt poor. We..we lived...Okay, but okay...

Q: When you say in a mixed neighbourhood - it was a neighbourhood of Jews, Poles?

A: Jews, Poles, Germans. There were in Lodz...Again, there was a large German population and a large Jewish population. And there were certain parts where Jews lived predominantly. We...

Q: What do you mean, a large part of German population?

A: Also.

Q: German Jews you mean?

A: No, no, no. Germans.

Q: Ah, Germans.

A: Volksdeutsche. And there were neighbourhoods where Jews lived predominately. And there were hei...and then they were scattered off in the city too, around. And I lived in a neighbourhood hwere those...a mixed neighbourhood, which I liked. Okay, we were...we had very close relations with some neighbours, friendly relationships.

BOBINE 352

Panama City Biren 2

Q: Well, tell me with some details about the reaction of the Poles

as soon as the German decrees against the Jews were enforced.

A: First thing was - Jews were beaten up, on the streets.

Q: By the Poles?

A: By the Poles. In the....where I lived, in the appartment building, the manager - janitor, that was a Pole, sort of took over. They said: we are now the managers. And not only managers, but you are nothing, we are taking over. They would come and take our furniture, take out things, even before we left for the ghetto, before the decrees of coming to....of establishing a ghetto. And they ordered us to move. They would...if for instance...the first thing was that we had to wear the star of David - on the arm first, then on the clothing, on the chest. And...

Q: Do you remember the first day you had to wear the star of David and the arm and on the chest?

A: Well, it is hard to remember the first day, but I remember the feeling that...it was horrible. It was unbelievable. And when....

Q: You didn't think to escape this?

A: Oh, I did. Or I wouldn't wear it. But it was dangerous. The Germans had not such a good way to...of telling who is Jewish or not. Our neighbours did. They would point out t e ones who were the Jews. And that he doesn't wear the star of David. And then there would be....

Q: You had to wear it because of the Poles?

A: That's right. So we just... Tell who is Jewish. And then the people, the Jews would be beaten up or taken to the Gestapo. Also they would rally up Jews to do work. Street work. But it was not so much the work, but to shame people, to beat them up, shame them. And so people would sit at home. They wouldn't dare to go out from hiding. And particularily men. But women as well. When we would...And also the rationing came in. War broke out, and there was a panic to buy stocks of food and so on. People had experience from the first war th t hunger...food will be a problem. And then bread started to be rationed, so that there were lines for bread, for the bakeries to get the daily bread. And we would be picked out from the lines and said to leave by the German youth and the Poles too. If the Germans didn't do it, the Poles helped them. So that is how it looked. Now, for instance, in my case, that manager janitor came and took furniture out, peaces of furniture, and we just couldn't

believe it. And I certainly was spirited into saying: no, it won't happen. don't let that happen. And my father and a neighbour - a middle aged woman who was also sprited enough, went to the Germans commander. It was done still before the orders. And they went there and they talked to the commander. And said: look, is that what ought to happen? that we will be pestered by the neighbours? So, it just points out how we felt then, of not wanting to accept it and saying no. And for the Germans. The commander came with us and told that janitor 'don't do that, you have no right to do that'. We were very proud. And we got the feeling that maybe we can sort of fight for our rights. Because now...I mean, what happened later that was sort of silly. Because pretty soon, in no time, were orders to....for the formation of the ghetto. And for us....

Q: It came very soon in...in Lodz.

A: Very soon. October, november. It was very soon. And we still would not sort of believe it that when they organized But the very seriously emptying that part of Lodz that was called Baluty. It was known ...a district known well because it was...the atmos....poverty in one sense and also crime, a seat of crime. And we just couldn't believe it that that was happening. They were, I mean, in our terms you would call it a slums of the city.

Baluty

Q: A slum.

A: Yes, it was a slum. But pretty soon the officials and corporations with the Jewish officials, the Jewish community, the leaders set up a machinery to accomplish that. They emptied...I mean, they asked the Poles...Mostly Poles lived there. Some Jews too. - to move. They left the Jews of course. The Poles had to move out some place else. And they designated then appartments or living space - because they were not even appartments. I don't know how much by square feet defined for a person. And I remember I worked in a school. The school didn't open needless to say. But we did gather in schools to deal with the paperwork. I remember we worked days and nights continuously to do that.

Q: Which paper work?

A: They were assigning the list of people, the list of Jews and flats.

BIR 2

Of matching them up. Work...so that they were assigned of course arbi...arbitrarly.

Q: The school was a Jewish school?

A: Ours...ours was a Jewish school. Yes....a private Jewish high school

Q: and did you have at the time, I mean, before the war, a feeling to belong to Judaism? Did you feel strongly...

A: Very strongly.

Q: ....Jewish?

A: Very strongly Jewish and very strongly Polish.

Q: Both?

A: Both. I was broght up in that atmosphere. My father was a very ardent Jew. But a secular Jew. He was a journalist in a Jewish newspaper, in a full Jewish newspaper. and he was working in one for all the years, all his life, that I had before the war. And his point of veew....His family as a matter of fact, the whole inkling was sort of, his family was Bundist. That was a...a strong movement at that time in Poland and in Russia.

Q: And in Lodz.

A: And in Lodz very strong. Particularily strong. I tell you why. So, the philosophy was that you are a citizen of the country where you are, and a committed citizen. But at the same time, you culturaly and otherwise - also a Jew. And you fight for your rights both ways. Now, why Lodz particularily? Because it was the biggest industrial city in Poland. It was quite the Polish Manchaster. In and ofcourse there was a great turbulence at the wake of the century and later and Socialism...workers. Very turbulent in the way of social happening, economical happening.

Q: And you describe the moving into the ghetto, because it is not an easy process....very complicated as a matter of fact to make such a segregation and to....to...to arrive to the ghettoisation of a whole sector of the population. There were very many Jews in Lodz.

A: Yes.

Q: ...More than two hundred thousand...

A: Right.

Q: ....which was 30% of the general population.

A: Right. I don't know....

Q: It's a tremendous task.

A: It was , it was a true chaos ,We couldn't accept it. We...we were fighting it within ourselves. Many people left. Many Jews left looking for..for a hiding place to avoid it. Many went eastwards to Russia. The border was open there. Some that had money tried to get out of the country. Not many did because it was limited. Visas and so on were not available. So people tried to get away. I remember, I had an aunt in Warsaw and we were thinking of going to Warsaw because....we thought that Warsaw was better off. The Germans did...incorporated Lodz and part of Poland into the Reich. Lodz became Litzmannstadt. They were Germanizing it and that became a German city. Warsaw was an open city. It was sort of military territory. I don't know how you call it, but it did not have...

Q: General Gouvernment.

A: Yes. They didn't have the sting that Lodz...

BOBINE 353

PANama City Biren 4

A: ...For our family to go to Warsaw and the did think it was safer there So I went with a cousin of mine that left Litzmannstadt the same morning, and took some clothes with me, sort of starting the move.

Q: Yes?

A: ...and we...the trip was dangerous because as Jews we couldn't we couldn't go, we would be stopped at the train station. But both of us looked not very much semitic, so we....what we did, we wore the star, but put some...a shawl around it so it...we pretended not to be Jews. It was risky, but we did it. And... only to find out when I came to my aunt in Warsaw....

Q: But there was no ghetto at the time....

A: There was no ghetto at the time, but there was a good deal of panic and uncertainty. Just the same. Things looked very bad there too.

Q: ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Yes?

A: So I came back with the news and anyway, you know, things progressed quickly. We, at a certain date, I don't remember well we had

to leave our house and got adress where to move to the ghetto and that was it. Our...

Q: And how did this...change take place? Can you describe it?in details?

A: In details you will have to imagine that we had from a large appartment, a very large appartment, we were ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ assigned - four of us in the family - a small room. And my grand-parents a small room, too, in the same building, lishna 6 in the ghetto. So we had to this idea that we have to leave the furniture....

Biren Panama City 4

A: We knew we would have to leave most of our belongings, the furniture and all that. Took some pidces that would fit in the new quarters. And the feeling was horrible. We were leaving your self and going into the unknown in the condition, new neighbours, and .....it was unreal. I don't know how to describe it, but it was very unreal.

Q: You said leaving yourself.

A: You thought like leaving your self and going into a jail. the ghetto was cir...encircled by barbed wire fences andthrough.... It was on both sides of a main artery, a main street that remained not part of the ghetto, so there were bridges...three wooden bridges built across. It was an...unreal. Like a circus, or...we didn't know what's going on...

Q: Did one have...have a feeling of solidarity with the other Jews who were gathered with you or was it something else - hatred or....

A: It was...sort of a feeling that everybody on his own. There was noffeeling of solidarity, there was no feeling of community, because it is sort of different. You tried to concentrate on your family, on the close family and maybe some friends. No, there was no contact at that time neither. Peo le were going that nobody else does.

Q: No, but it is because I tried to figure how...what does it mean. Because it is true, you were...you were Jewish and you

felt strongly Jewish, but what did it mean to be suddenly gathere only with Jews?

A: It was ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ totaly a new experience. It was , it took a long time to settle down. I was never used for instance, to be a part - administratively - of a Jewish community. I mean, there was a Jewish community, Jewish leadership, but I was never part of it. I was part of a city community. And all of a sudden you have to deal all with Jews. And the community leaders... I cannot describe it, but it was unreal. It was not how I was used to. And...

Q: The Judenrat...

A: The Judenrat, yes.

Q: The Judenrat was already settled.

A: It was settled. Before, in normal times, the Judenrat was sort of a Gemeinde ....

Q: Yes, the Ke...Kehila.

A: Kehila....was concerning themselves with the welfare, people that needed help, all kinds of religious things, social for people that needed help. So I didn't have any notice of them. And all of a sudden they became very important, they were the givers of the rules and restrictions and laws. It was just all of a sudden like a Jewish state....

Q: Yes.

A: ...was being formed, and you cannot tell why and what for.

Q: A parody of a Jewish state.

A: ...because it was a parody, it was not a Jewish state. It was decreed by the Germans.

Q: Yes?

A: So, I think your reaction is...I think we all were numb. We didn't know in a way what's going on. Things began to be mechanical and we were just doing things in half a daze. Because it was so abnormal,,So out of context. It just didn't make sense.

Q: Yes, and this was very early. It was in 19....

A: 40.

Q: And your parents?

A: My parents...My parents were very strong parents, strong people. Leaders

Leaders. I always grew up with the feeling I could depend on them for leadership, for guidance and to solve things. It was the only way I knew. So it was natural. And at that time they...it was painful to see that your parents don't know what to do either. So , and they are....

Q: defenceless.

A: ...and helpless. But they were strong physically and strong leadin the whole moving and so on. They are in charge. But they had no way of effecting things. That was....you sort of expected them to do something, to protect you or to do something. Protest to... Oh, I was mad. Because I thought my parents did know what to do. run away, leave. They didn't get themselves into in the ghetto. I wanted to leave. Some of my friends did. Eastwards to Russia. I said: why don't we go? Why don't we go, all of us. Mother said: My parents (my grandparents), how can I leave them? I said: leave. Don't you see what's going on? And she said: no. Besides, where should I go? ~~there is no place.~~ it's my home

Q: That's what she said?

A: Yes. why should I go? And my fatherm to. So I...He said: If you want to go, go. And I couldn't.

Q: Because they didn't want to leave?

A: I didn't want to leave. that I cannd leave them to save my life, to escape Germany, which I could - to the east. But I...I couldn't do it.

Q: You said that everybody was trapped by...by the family.

A: By the ties.

Q: By the ties.

A: We could not...I don't know what you call it, but there were some basic things. You are angry about it because your father is . Xx And you don't want to participate in it. It is too shameful to go in the ghetto, to be behind barbed wire, and you are well and wealthy. And all of a sudden.... because there was not a way. And your.... I think how can I leave them in a problem....

Q: Yes,

A: And save my life.

Q: A"d how did you organize yourself to leve?

A: to what?
Q: to leave.
A: the ghetto?
Q: Yes.
A: Oh, it was wintertime and Poland has quite a lot of snow, so we moved things on sledges. And I remember there were lines and lines of people going towards the ghetto...
Q: You remember the lines.
A: yes. sledges with a horse. People moving things. It was a very frightful procession. And then

Q: And you had a...you had a flat for yourself or you were crowded with....
A: Oh, we had one room for four people. I was seventeen, my sister eleven, and my parents, and that was it. There was an outside toilet, you know, downstairs. And everybody...I means the others had it too, that one room. It was very crowded.

BOBINE 354
Panama City Biren 5

A: So talked...We were talking about how we made...the ghetto and the closing of the ghetto. And....the reflection is how it was possible that we went there, that we went, were going, that I couldn't believe it as we were going, that....You have to remember that at that time what was going on with the Jews, and not only the Jews, the Poles too, to be fair, because I remember my family, very good friends of ours, neighbours, Poles, the father was captured and probably killed and the family just moved away. So it was happening all over. But Jews were arrested, Jews were killed, houses were invaded. I remember one evening, we were sitting and streets were cordoned and Gestapo coming and asking for goods, money, jewelry and whatever, robbing. That was a constant fear. Jews were taken to the Gestapo and beaten up. They were killed, they were shamed in the street. Prticularily Jews...men with beards...The chassidic...the religious Jews were shamed and spat on and so on.

Q: Did you witness this?
A: oh, yes. That was pretty common.
Q: It was an everyday....
A: It was an everyday occurrance. And the fear of going out in the streets was tremendous. You felt like hiding, we had to hide to avoid that. So we...shortly after the beginning, we were living from day to day in terror, and fear, constant fear, unrelenting. And when those decrees came to leave the houses and ghetto...into the ghetto, one became numb. it was paralysed already. People were running, trying to find places....
Q: Did you have the feeling that the ghetto would be a kind of protection?
A: No. There was no feeling of that kind at that time. It was a feeling that it is sort of a beginning of death. So the feeling of death became an everyday occurrance, that we are being killed.
Q: The fear was...the fear of being killed...
A: Of being killed.
Q: ...was overwhelming.
A: ...overwhelming and all the time.
Q: And present every day.
A: And present every day.
Q: Yes, and can you say now what happened to you after...
A: Oh, when we went...we went to the ghetto and started to live there somehow. And in a while it was amazing really - looking back - how quickly the ghetto...and how well it was organized. It was unbelievable. I didn't know Rumkowski before and his name. It didn't mean much in the beginning. But gradually, as I was in the ghetto, that became sort of a name and well known. He was the president of the ghetto, of the Judenrat and took the job rather seriously. We were surprised...I was surprised how can one take so seriously a job of having a ghetto, a Jewish ghetto, and be a leader of it. But he took...took it very seriously. At the beginning we made jokes and we laughed and we said: ha, ha, a Jewish state, a parody, and so on. But pretty soon it was nothing of that sort. He took it I think with a sort of iron hand

BIR5

and organized it quickly: shops of work that he said we would survive only if we work, that we are worth to the Germans what our hands can produce for the war machinery. And pretty soon, in no time it was so.

Q: It was a personal ideology of Rumkowski during the whole time of the ghetto, during the four years of the Lodz ghetto, the idea that work meant survival, no?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: It was a policy.

A: That was his policy. And it is...What he was saying is...in his speeches that it is a condition of our survival made by the Germans. He was in a pact with the Germans, with the Germans, and that was their policy. So...I don't know. That was their policy, that's clear. He was the administrator of it and we hated him for it.

Q: You did?

A: Of course.

Q: But did you...did you have yourself this feeling, this inner feeling that being...that work meant being alive, to remain alive?

A: I don't remember having any feelings about it. I was overwhelmed. It was war, that was the fact. Pretty soon the fact...if one was philosophical at the beginning, towards ....a little later you stopped being philosophical. That was indeed. It was so. People that didn't work were sent out. The story was at first that it was to labour camps outside, elsewhere. And I think in the beginning it was so. But pretty soon we had other news that those were some camps that the people might not be alive, that they had been sent out to die. But we didn't know. And I think part of the ...the weapons that the Germans used was that we didn't know. It was all vage and it was not here and there and left and right, and we didn't know. There was a total confusion.

Q: But this is a very important question because there were... the deportations of Jews who took place in the Lodz ghetto, like in all the other ghettoes as a matter of fact, and... we know today that the people were killed, they were killed

either in Chelmno in the gasvans or in other extermination camps and in Auschwitz too. And when the people were taken away for the deportation there were orders for the deportation which were given, did you know hwat it meant?

A: At first we didn't, we were just suspicious, but later we did. I did. I had no doubts.

Q: When did youknow?

A: I think it came about...maybe towards the end of 41, 42.

Q: This means pretty early.

A: All right, yes, 42. Because at that time we did have people coming from small towns around Lodz from...And they were telling us that they...what was going on. As a matter of fact, I knew people that came and they knew that the others were sent to Chelmno, so that in...some people saw Chelmno, so we knew for sure. At some point we knew for skure. In 42 I knew for sure.

Q: And you were not the only one to know?

A: And I was not the only one.

Q: And Rumkowski himself knew very well.

A: But he wouldn't say. I think he knew, but he wouldn't say it. He said: we are sending them to work.

Q: He always said it?

A: To my knowledge.

Q: I don't think so because there were speeches of Rumkowski which are very clear, when he says that he stands with bloody hands, that his job to give away a part of the Jewish population in order to save another part. He knew exactly what it meant and he didn't hide it.

Q: Well, I dont...I also know that when they...the deportation of children came, what officials were saying was that the children are being sent to a special camp, that they would be taken care of and they will have it well. We cannot feed them here in the ghetto, but we will take them to another place. It was never stated that they will be killed.

Q: Could you talk precisely about this - the deportation of the children?

A: Yes. I think that was the worst moment I lived through in the ghetto. When I....when we heard Rumkowski's speech about it,

announcing that children will be taken. We got sort of used to it that people that don't work would be taken, if they are lazy or what not, they were being sent away, or people...well the sick ones were taken away already. But that children would be taken away, that was...this was just unbelievable, that was just unbelievabl .

Q: First of all, how did Rumkowski held his speeches. Where was the gathering of the people. Was everybody obliged to....?

A: There were few spots that there were megaphons from whereever he was making the speech so one could hear. That was sort of a central point in the ghetto. And people were....oh, I think that there were announcements made that he would talk at such time and people would gather at this place.

Q: And one was obliged to...to listen to the speeches?

A: No, no, but everybody was curious what is going on. These were questions of life and death. So people would go.

Q: And can you describe the atmosphere of...of Rumkowski's speeches?

A: Well, just...I don't know....

Q: ...the way the people reacted....because the ghetto of Lodz was a very special one.

A: I think the best way to describe it first, is that they lasted for a long time, minutes or what not. It was just dead silence. People waited and disbelieved and numb....

BOBINE 355
Panama City Biren 6

Q: Okay, the Rumkowski speeches.

A: Well, so he spoke his piece and people went home crying, eventually crying and lamenting and totally helpless, and totally...

Q: I read that during some of the speeches of Rumkowski there were ...the people lamented not only when they went home but during the speeches.

A: Yes. First was a death silence and then...

Q: When he started?

A: when...yes. There were people who couldn't believe it.

Q: Because was it taken for granted by the people who assembled to listen at him that he could only deliver bad news?

A: That's it. Any Speech made bad news. And it was so. There was never good news. So as we went deeper and deeper into the yearsand years there were more and more bad news.

Q: No, but you know, it's very difficult to...to understand, and it's what I am trying with your help to figure out, because the Lodz ghetto was a very spe///special one: It was the first ghetto to be settled in Poland and the last one to be destroyed. But...

A: It was a strong ghetto.

Q: It was a strong ghetto, yes. It lasted for more than four years.

A: Well organized.

Q: Yes, and I think there were several periods during these four years, and there were some people who survived. I mean before the liquidation of the ghetto in August 44 there were sixty thousand Jews still in the...in the ghetto. And, okay, let's try...

A: I...I told you, the speech. He said that we have to give the children, and how painful it would be and how agonizing it is. And how agonized he is. But at the same time the other underline was that the children will not be killed. They are going to survive....

Q: First of all, let's not take the things for granted. Which category of children would be taken away? projection

A: Under nine years old. All children, babies, infants, new borns. There were new borns. There were children born in the ghetto too. And all of them had to go.

Q: This was asked by the Germans?

A: So Rumkowski said.

Q: It was in September 1942.

A: Okay. As a matterof fact....

Q: What...what did the parents think when the...

A: I think...all right, I just could tell you how I preceived that in the house I lived. Because people were coming and lamenting. My own feeling was I think, thank God, We don't have any children under nine years. We're safe.

Q: We are safe.

A: Yes, my family is safe. My sis...yes, my sister was.... what - fourteen at the time. Mxx We are safe. And then

you listened to the others. People that had children. So there was a dual life. Sort of like you were in a dream. The things are happening and you really don't know what's happening. Mothers lamented and they said: all right, they will have it better than we.

Q: The children?

A: Yes. Because for at least the older children, the order was: give them some clothing and give them also a...a ...dishes to eat from. You know, a spoon and a dish to eat. So that they can have something on the way to be fed. And they were talking about special camps for the children where they will be kept and they will have better circumstances, better....

Q: There was hunger in the ghetto at that time?

A: Yes. Ghetto was hungry. Worsening all the time. People were dying from hunger. People were dying in the street from hunger, with swolen legs, swollen faces. We were hungry. And then they sort of started talking in those terms. And you thought it was a bad dream. You couldn't believe it and you couldn't wake up from it either.

Q: And I would like to know, were there people - I don't say many - who...who knew That wasn't true? Not only who knew the truth, but who...who could perfectly imagine that the children would be taken away, this means that they were unuseful mouths, and that it was to destroy them.

A: Well, I had a neighbour, and - a lovely lady - and I was in good friendship with her. She came I think towards the end of 41 or so, and...from a little town where...they liquidated the little town. Her husband was a member of the Judenrat. He was killed in her eyes. She and her little girl that was ten came into the ghetto. And she was a very sensitive, bright woman. And we were very good friends. She told me everything what happened there. Then I had known...that was one source for me that I had no doubts what is happening outside. She knew.

Q: That they were killing.

A: That they were killing, yes. And then, of course, after

BIR 6

the speech of Rumkowski we went home and I spent hours with her, talking. And she said: well, look at all those people who are....how let they kid themselves. Those children will be killed. And I said: what are you going to do? And she said: well, I have no qualms. I know what I am going to do. I am not going to give away my girl. And she was very calm about it. Calm and resolved. And then the day came that our street was cleaned. And usually...and we had to go out in the backyard and the Germans came. And then in front of the street a few Gestapo, who knows who, SS....

Q: Excuse me, this was made, this action, by the Germans or by the Jewish....

A: By the Germans.

Q: The Jewish police didn't participate?

A: I don't recall. My attention was you know, paid to the Germans. The Germans had guns. So, we were collected in the yard and I was next to her, to my friend and her little girl. And the Ger...

Q: In the same yard?

A: In the same yard. Next to her. And then the Germans started to pull out the children. Well, first they started: all children talala, come, step out. And many didalready. and the children stepped out. That little girl also made a step forward. And...

Q: She did?

A: Yes. And the mother pulled her back and said: no, you stay here. And an SS man came to the woman and said: put the child. And she says no. In German she said: Nein. And he said: you better do it or else I shoot you. So she says: go ahead and shoot me. So he grabbed her by the neck, turned her around and shot her. So she fell next to me.

Q: In front of the daughter.

A: In front of the daughter. And the daughter was taken out.

Q: Yes. There must have been horrible scenes.

A: I couldn't move for two-three days. I was just sitting stunned. I just couldn't move. And then it is all for-taken. You have to go on.

Q: So the...

A: So life went on.

Q: Yes, and do you remember the speech of Rumkowski for this...when he announced this action?

A: I don't remember in detail. I remember the gest of it and the feeling after, but not in detail.

Q: This means that this population of two hundred thousand people at the beginning, there were always year after year people which were...

A: No doubt. And if you say sixty thousand. I don't know what proportion of that was people from Lodz originally. BEcause it was a town of Babel. People were...our people were...the Lodz people were sent out and others were transported in from the little towns surrounding Lodz, from other far away towns, and also from outside, German Jews, Viennese Jews. A transport of Viennese old people came. Czech people, young people, Chech people, wonderfull people. many of them didn't know why? Many of them didn't know they were Jews.

Q: Do you remember the arrival?

A: Oh, yes. Because I worked in the...the bureau that was giving...I don't know how to say this...distributing the living space.

Q: Wohnungsabteilung.

A: Wohnungsabteilung. Right, thank you. So I had direct contact with each transport. BEcause they were coming ...

Q: With the incoming transports.

A: With the incoming transports.

Q: Not with the outgoing .

A: No, no, no, no. With the incoming transports. They would come and we would insign...assign living space. So I saw the character of each group, and how they looked and how they were. And we would talk. We would talk some time with them. And we would ask them questions. I remember I was very struck by the German group of Jews, because they were all older people, totally bewildered. They came...it was sort of...we were sort of hardened. The ones that were surviving were hardened.

BIR 7

BOBINE 356
Panama City Biren 7

A: We were talking about the influx of the German Jews. They were totally bewildered, they...We were already in the war and suffered hardship, we were getting used with great losses, people dying. But we were slowly into it. Those people came totally unprepared. They came from relatively better conditions. They were just pulled out and deported east. They were dying quickly.

Q: But it is difficult to understand because they came after years of persecution already.

A: Well, I...I probably so, but when you looked at them, it was different. We were in a ghetto and we...in labour... during the labour, work and hardship, they didn't it. I rather felt that they were coming from persecution from Germany, but they lived in relatively normal circumstances They were being fished out from....relatively to us more normal to us, more and so on. And also, they were people fished out that probably were just discovered to be Jews. You know, somehow they were living in a normal circumstance, but they were just being discovered and so on and so forth. And just at that point they were declared enemies and sent off. Not that they didn't suffer, they lived with that fear all the time, that's true. But for many it was a surprise. I know the Czech Jews. They were totally....Why? they said: you are a Jew - go. you are a Jew go. And at this point only it hit them. Also, whatever it was, they were on their grounds, in their homes, in their cities, in their culture. They were pulled out and transplanted in a total different enviroment, emotionally, phisically, everything.

Q: You mean that they were made Jews before dying in one way?

A: That's right.

It did not make sense to them. Maybe it has to....

Q: ...to you, let's say to the eastern Jews. How did they behavein front of you.

A: I think the best I can describe: nothing. They were

bewildered, they didn't know what was happening. They felt sort of put in a zoo. So to just let you know how we looked. What a zoo it was.

Q: Why do you say this?

A: Because it was like a zoo. It was animalistic. It was not human anymore. We lived not a human life. And the only thing I think that one developed was numbness and a dreamlike state.

Q: And you said too - hardness. That you hardened.

A: I think the hardening was the putting on of the shell, of numbness and just living and hoping that someday - maybe. But right now you just had to close your eyes and ears, you just have to withdraw into yourself, think about your family and hope you survive. Fight for survival.

Q: But you say that it looked like a zoo, which I understand. But it was a zoo with an administration?

A: It was a zoo with administration. It was also...on a personal level, we ...there was hunger, we were all...weight loss, , no proper clothing, we'd make shoes for the winter from scraps, you couldn't buy shoes, so you wore some...made out of scraps, sort of make shoes. So it was literaly When you looked you had to take away your eyes and say: just forget it all, just go on from day to day.

Q: Yes.

A: All the dignity was taken away. We lost the dignity a long time ago.

Q: Can you say more than this?

A: There was nothing...encircled with barbed wire, outside were German police guarden...guarding it. Outside were the Poles, that couldn't give a damn, and were sort of as a matter of fact probably glad that...or indifferent. So we had no friends. Not whatsoever. And of course we would listen to the news,or some did - for it was prohibited, radios and so on...

Q: There were no radios?

Kaulke

A: There were some underground. So we would know the news and we knew that nobody cares for the world, we were dead. And that was incomprehensible.

Q: Do you remember the day when Rumkowski, the Judenälteste the chief of the judenrat, created his own currency?

A: Yes, oh yes, we had our own..

Q: with his picture.

A: Yes we had our own currency, we had a theater, we had a symphony or something like that. And you lived there, at last I did, in a total dreamlike state. You didn't dare to think or if you did, you would go mad or kill yourself.

Q: But how did you use the currency? Because it was completely without any kind of value outside the ghetto.

A: But we were cut off. Even if we had currency, we were cut off totally.

Q: But were there in Lodz like Warschau or in Warsaw smugglers who... people who made traffic with the outside world in order to permit the population of ghetto to eat?

A: I... well, I know one point of smuggling was... would be in ... where food would come in, people that would bring food into the ghetto, and I suppose there were some Poles bringing it and there would be some trading. But it was only for the very few and the few who worked already in the... Don't forget Rumkowski had... it was not only by himself, but he had also a government, many people that sort of lived of it very comfortably, very well. And there was that group of population that lived very well...

Q: ... privileged.

A: privileged, and they had food, and they would and they would hardly eat up to
They sort of didn't give a damn
and did the best
Q: He had a rather huge administration.
A: That's right Not that every body was
like that, but there was certainly a
good part of it that was... sort of took
that very seriously. They considered
themselves very seriously, people in
government, and ate well and lived
well and thought that

Q: Was there corruption in the ghetto?

A: Terrific, terribly. But the worst corruption was about life. Because if people were sent out, the corruption was there - who will be sent out. Right? So people that had influence, of course they did care for their own folk. ~~The xxxxx~~ So of course the others that didn't have influence would go.

Q: You mean there was a traffic for life.

A: Of course.

Q: Who will...

A: That's right, who would live.

Q: ...and who will die.

A: That's right.

Q: Could you give examples for this?

A: Eh....

Q: I mean how was the cor...corruption resented by the ...not resented, how was the corruption felt by the people?

A: Well, I don't know. I am just trying to think how I felt it at jobs you had to find. At one point only men had to work and able women or younger wmen. Then the point came that everybody, all women had to work - or they'd be sent out. My mother didn't work so....

Q: She did work?

A: She didn't work at that...at one point. And then she... the...the edict came that whoever will not work will be sent out, sick or well or what. So we had to find a job for mother...

Q: What was the word for to be sent out?

A: Deported. Deported.

Q: Deproted. Yes, but what wasthe word for to be deported?

A: (several sentences spoken together - ilegible)

A: So I had to find a job looking for a job. How do you find a job? I had to go ask somebody. And I did. In the office that I worked I asked for and fortunately I did get a job for her....that I thought very low in....

Q: This was a case of corruption?

A: Well, that was a case that if you didn't have an influence

if I wouldn't...I had nowhere, mother had nowhere, she couldn't go in and and say: I am employable, I want to work. I had to look for „Protektzia — that was the word - Whoever didn't have Protektzia, couldn't survive. Mind you, I was young then too. I had no big meaning and if I wouldn't just go and ask and was not given, that was it.

Q: But did you yourself, did it happen to you that you occupied, you, in these four years, a privileged position?

BOBINE 357
PAnanma City Biren 8

Q: ....to be privileged?

A: Oh, in a way yes. The others own money in the ghetto, in government and all that, Rumkowski's tradition. his school. High school. Two last classes. The junior and senior class. To some others too. And I was then in the senior class. And it was a mixture of people, all remnants of all schools available in the city. And we studied of sorts.

Q: Where was it? Where?

A: 41. I graduated in 41. So, Rumkowski also...He paid a lot of attention to it. He, as I told you, he took the job seriously. And...then there was an idea, I don't know from whom it came - from him or others,- that he also wanted to prepare the youth for Palestine (he was a great Zionist). And a number of hachsharahs were established where young people would live on the land. There was some land on the outskirts of the ghetto....

Q: Hachsharah is a kind of farm settlement.

A: A farm settlement and to teach Jewish youth to work it not used to, to work on the land with the idea of settling in Israel, in Palestine then, doing agriculture. So, a group of us in class, got together and established such a farm with his help. He totally agreed to that.

Q: Inside the ghetto?

A: Inside the ghetto. There were some land....

Q: Not in the town?

A: In the outskirts, not in the cnetr centre.

but the outskirts. And there was an abandoned school or orphanage. The Poles vacated it. And there was farmland and some cattle, etc. And we moved in there, boys and girls. And we had a gardener, a farmer, a German refugee who was farming it really, and we were helping. He was teaching us.

Q: A Jew?

A: A Jew. And so we lived there and were going to school. And that was a rather wonderful year, considering where we were. And it was also sort of a....

Q: It was in which year, in 1941...?

A: 41.

Q: 41?

A: Yes. The school year. And we stayed on a little longer. So we would work on the land and raise crops, tomatoes and vegetables, flowers and all that, and also there were goats, we would milk goats and bring it into stores in the ghetto, to the cooperative. That was sold then to people. And we went to school and also had a good time. It was a nice group. And it was good living. We did enough food....have enough food for ourselves, plenty, really, it was almost a shame. But we were not allowed to bring it home. That was an ethical point. We could do that there because we were raising food. But we could not share it with our families. It was very painful. Because there was hunger back home. So one felt guilty about it.

Q: And in the same time your parents were hungry?

A: At the same time....of course. At the same time my parents were very much for it, sort of they enjoyed, they went along with it. It was a good experience for me in sort of being away from home and having fun and all that, and going to school. But the pain was the conditions. Here they are struggling, and I had it so good. That was difficult. However after the...well, then we graduated from....We were...we felt very privileged, that's the point. Rumkowski was sort of giving in to us, was treating us as chidren, his children, his future. That was a funny feeling because on one hand we couldn't take

seriously the whole ghetto experience, on the otherehand
we were enjoying it too.
Q: But Rumkow...Rumkowski ~~was~~ had an taste an indlination for
the youth, he liked the youth?
A: Absolutely. He said so. I think he...I think he was a
director of an orphanage before.
Q: Yes.
A: And he really did care for children and liked children.
Q: What did he say, how did he see the youth? I mean, in the
frame...framework of this ghetto life, what was the youthh
....the youth for him?
A: He said that we are the future, and we would be the ones
he would educate. It was such a grandios idea under the
circumstances. But nevertheless, how can you fight it?
It made sense. We are the future, and leaders, future
leaders, and he will help us so that we can be in Palestine
Q: How...how were you chosen to board this school?
A: This group? This was voluntary. Not everybody wanted.
That was a voluntary thing. Whoever wanted, could join from
the class. But there were not many takers. One was
too. It was hard work.
Q: Yes?
A: And away from the home. But a group of us did that. So...
Q: It was a small island inside the ghetto?
A: Right. And he was very proud of us. He was graduating us
from highschool and gave a wonderful speech how much
we mean and that how much he will help us, and do every-
thing for us.
Q: How long did last this group?
A: Well, about a year, about a year.
Q: And the school went on during the whole time of....
A: No.
Q: ...the ghetto?
A: no, no. We graduated and I think another class graduated,
and then the school closed. It was 42 by then, and there
was not much energy for schoolling any more. Things were
falling apart. People were sent out. It became more and
more life and death. There was no energy for school any

Rumm liked to be it...

more. It became unimportant.

Q: Unimportant?

A: Yes.

Q: And what happened after...after you graduated?

A: After we graduated he sort of gave us jobs. We became then employable and gave us jobs. I know a group of us, part of the group got a job in a factory that was making uniforms for the Germans. And it was a horrible experience because the way it was that we would be educated and do something important was: we were put in the machinery to work for the Germans.

Q: You made uniforms for the...

A: Yes.

Q: ...for the Whermacht?

A: For the Wehrmacht. Coats, raincoats with cautshuck. You know we would use the....

Q: The famous raincoats.

A: The famous raincoats of the Germans. It was a horrible experience. Nightshifts and dayshifts, and very hard work. And horrible supervision by the Jewish tailors that just had a day with you know, sort of the girls that just came out of high school and had it so good. Here you are, now sweat.

Q: Now the sweat.

A: Now the sweat. Now we show you what life is. So it came from both sides. Working those raincoats, the army raincoats, and the supervisors. A pretty horrible experience.

Q: But they were hating you, the Jewish tailors? Did they hate you?

A: I don't know. Did they hate us? They were just angry themselves. They were themselves captives of the machinery I don't think they enjoyed making raincoats for Germans, and doing that job. So there was an angry, tense situation: What are we doing here?

Q: Oh, yes. I see. And who went in this factory? everybody? girls, boys?

A: No. That was for the girls, the job for the girls. A number of us.

Q: Yes, and the boys?

A: Well, for the boys he had other jobs.
Q: What kind of jobs?
A: All kinds of, similar to that.
Q: You don't want to say it?
A: I wasn't there. I worked with...in that sweatshop.
Q: At least you could say it. Do it, please.
A: Do?
Q: Do it.
A: No. That's for other people to say.
Q: May I say it?
A: No.
Q: No?
A: No.
Q: Okay. And after this factory, what did you do?
A: After that factory, what did I do? Oh, there was another noble job that Rumkowski had for some of us. He organized a women's police force.
Q: That's what he did with the boys, you can say this.
A: And...
Q: After graduation.
A: And I was recruited to be a police-woman. Very funny. It was funny really. The job was to be...to keep order on the streets, traffic....

BOBINE 358

Panama City Biren 9

Q: But what was the need for...for a women police force?
A: The need was to keep the streets in order. Order was a very fateful problem.
Q: Ordnung.
A: Ordnung, yes. But what was the disorder? The disorder was some black marketing on the streets. People would sell....peddlers would be there and sell cigarettes or candies. There was hunger. The candies were...I don't kno what...but something sweet. The quality, you know, was awful, but something sweet. And that was verboten.

Q: By whom?
A: By Rumkowski.
Q: Why?
A: Don't ask me. There was black market. Because the people to make candy.
Q: When you talked about....Pardon. When you talked about order you mean moral order?
A: Moral order and cleanliness on the street. Yes. I think it would amount to moral order. Of course it his the l little people. But the people would have to get sugar somehow to make candies. They would have to get it from... on the black market, because there was not enough from rations, So it was black market. And he wanted to stop it. So the women police force would be given this task to keep order and get the people of the streets.
Q: Yes. I ask why women. There were not enough men in the police?
A: Well, that...Rumkowski had ideas. He thought it was neat. to put women in...in police uniforms and have them onto the streets of the ghetto.
Q: He was a pioneer as a matter of fact?
A: All right. So, the chief of the police became an old gentleman, a Czech. Lovely....
Q: What's the name?
A: I forgot. I don't know the name. But I remember....I think he was a professor of one sort or the other. He had nothing to do with police or forcing...enforcing the law as such in his life in Prague. So he and his secretary, also a Pr...a woman from Prague, were the chiefs. And I was andofficer and there were then the police girls...
Q: You did wear a uniform?
A: Oh yes.
Q: Yes?
A: Yes.
Q: What kind of uniform?
A: A jacket and a hat, some police hat...
Q: You had boots?
A: Well, who had boots? No, shoes...I don't know. That

would be too much, I suppose. But it was funny....

Q: The men, the Jewish police...the male force, they wore a boots.

A: I don't remember it really. I don't remember that you had police boots, any tall boots or other. I don't remember that. But it was sort of....to me it was comical. And why to hell I participated, I don't know. But one needed to work. Otherwise one was sent out. And that was the offer for his graduates, so I was there. So, that was it...

Q: No. Explain me, what was...okay; you said what was the work, but what were the means you had to...to enforce this work? I mean? you could arrest people?

A: No. Not really. In a sense, they...the presumption was that if there are police girls walking and asking people to go off, they would. The next step was, if the...if the person would still not,....that's right, there was...to arrest the guy or whatnot and bring them to the police station, to the nearest police station - for there were many.

Q: Many police stations?

A: yes. But the job would be done then by the police men. But women had to bring them to the police station.

Q: Did you do it?

A: I was working in the office.

Q: And you were not in the street?

A: I was not on the street. I was in the office. And my time was spent....it was administratively and then talking with this old gentleman about Prague and the world. He just came not long ago, so I would listen to stories, sort of thinking if there is a world beyond where we were. But I did experience something very very very unnerving. And that was it, the girls, some of them were complaining, were rebelling. They didn't want to do that because it was not so innoculous. You see, the time started, as we were there, that the order was then: peddlars arrested on the street will be deported. Okay? For a while it was not so. So it was sort of a very innocent. But then the order was

that peddlers will be deported. And also to the police-women: you arrest them. A sort of a heated thing: you arrest them and deliver the peddlers. So one day there was a girl - they...we were allfriends of course, and she talked to me and she said: I cannot do it any more. I don't want to, and so on. I listened and she says: well, you have to go with me. You are sitting in the office and you don't know. You have to go with me, or else....I mean it was a way...moving appeal. And I said: all right. So one evening I went with her. And here was this middle aged guy with a little sort of tablor hanging over his neck on a string and he had a few candies that he was trying to sell. And this friend of mine said to him...she said: you don nothing (to me), you just watch me. You do nothing, I just want you to see. And she asked him to leave this street, to get off the street. And he said: no. And she asked him again. And he said no. She siad: I have to arrest you, or I have to bring you to the station. And she was force+ ful. I mean,...And she took him to the station. And I was there.

Q: Yes?

A: And then we left the station and she said: Now, what do you think? I couldn't say nothing. We walked the whole night in the streets of the ghetto. She said: you know that he may be deported? So after that night I resolved, I am getting out. I can't take that. I had to get out. The other....agony is that if I get out, I have no job. I'll be deported. So as it happened, I was not...I didn't need to agonize over that because within a week or so the police was disolved. But I don't know what I would have done. Stay on or not?

Q: Yes, and do you know something about the feelings of the ...of the men, of the Jewish police or not? Did they feel guilty in one way or not?

A: I don't know. I...If we would talk with people that were in the police, friends or acquaintences, that

was never mentioned. Feelings were not talked about.
Q: And today? These people who were in the police....
A: Look, I couldn't tell you that, talk to you about that till a few years ago. I would not talk.
Q: Yes, can you explain what happened?
A: I would be...feel to guilty, to ashamed to tell you that, that I was there and that...how I felt then, the whole struggle and the impossibility, and nobody to talk to, nobody to discuss more issues with, like...other than with this girl that I did. The agony through the night. But that was the only time that we had a chance to do it.
Q: The others didn't talk?
A: So there was no talk. No. It was too horrible to talk. How could you? What was the choice? Shoot yourself... there were no guns either. You couldn't shoot yourself. That...What was the choice?
Q: No, but I ask you the question and I...
A: No, we could not talk.
Q: I can say it publicly because I tried to...to meet and to interview for the film several people, several men who were in the police force of Lodz. And all of them refused categorically to talk. I succeeded to have some others of other ghettoes talking, but not of Lodz...as if there would be a big secret...How do you explain that they...
A: I don't know...I still have a hard time...
Q: This is a general discussion.
A: Yes. I have a hard time to tell why I would not talk about it.

BOBINE 359
Biren Panama City 10

Q: Well, I wanted to say this. I have found some people of other ghettoes than Lodz who were in the police force, in the Jewish police force, and some of them agreed to talk to me. And they did it rather openly. Well, I have found two people of Lodz, Jewish policemen of Lodz, who occupy now rather important positions in life and

all of them escaped completely my questions. I mean, I didn't even get the occasion to talk about this. Because they knew that I wanted to talk, and they just escaped or they shut their mouth, they shut their door. And I was very struck because it is like...it was a big secret behind this and there are things that I don't understand. Or do they feel so extremely guilty. And I didn't want to accuse them at all, the other way around, I wanted to help the people to understand why Jews had been enlisted in the police force, and sometimes against their will. But I had no chance. Maybe you can help me to understand this.

A. I don't know if I can really. But I can tell you...yes, I can tell you only and I don't know even how I can explain why I would not talk about it till a very few years ago. But I wouldn't. And if I went to search why, I think the guilt about...the guilt that I did wrong, that I didn't do enough, that I'm alive, my family is not, that I tried so hard to save them, to help them survive - and myself - and I didn't succeed. That I sort of felt I delivered them by going to Auschwitz with my family and surviving. I delivered them to the Germans and I'm alive. And that was an untouchable issue. I just could not get over that. And the same like working in the ghetto for the German machinery, war machinery, for all those years; being in the police and having those feelings. I felt - or at least later, not then, then it was clear, I had no choice - I was doing, searching and soul searching as we were going along. But later I thought that I had a choice - I could kill myself. Why didn't I do it.

Q: Later you thought this?

A: Later I thought it.

Q: Yes, but this was the only alternative, it was either to work for the German machinery, or to commit suicide.

A: That's right. But I couldn't understand this understanding for myself. Maybe one...why it happened was because after the war when indeed I, for myself, and I know others, wanted to talk about it to people that were otherwi...

other places, in other countries, Russia or Israel or whatnot, and to non-Jews, the feeling was that nobody wanted to listen about it. Nobody wanted to hear. So I shut up, I decided then inside; you are not going to talk because nobody wants to hear about it. And I clammed up. I remember distinctly after...shortly after the coming from Auschwitz to Lodz, back, I and a friend of mine met with this woman who also was not having a picnic in the war, she was hiding on aryan papers someplace and came back to Lodz. And we talked about the experience and we told her, for instance, how it was in the Auschwitz, that our hair was shaven, heads and otherwise, and how we looked and how animalistic all was, and the woman said: My goodness, after all that you can do anything, you can be a street preformer.

Q: A what?

A: A street preformer. And you know, in Europe it is...street preforming in Poland was, you know, jugglers and all kinds, fire eaters and glass walkers. That was her response. And I and my friend were looking at each other and said: all right, enough of that, we won't talk. So, with such attitude, when you come out after the experience and you tell people and you get this response, what are you to do?

Q: Yes. I understand this. But I am n...Are you sure that this is the s...for the same reasons that these people I just mentioned, refuse to talk. Because I think that personally the tragedy of these people...the whole ghetto was working for the German machinery. There was no other way whatsoever. The people who were in the workshops making uniforms and boots for the Germans were working for the German machinery. And we know that the people who were in the police they had to lead the people to the trains, th the stations, for the deportatio -they were. We know this. But I don't judge them at all. I would never dare to do such things.

A: It's enough if I judge myself. Why should you?

Q: I have not the right.

A: That is the thing, that I....All through the years we met at the point where a lot of that came to the

conclusion - not without help, that it really is rediculous that when you are jailed and dehumanized and it's done to you, you are feeling bad about what the others did to you? And somehow it occurred to me that I did. Nonesense. That should be the way around, and I went this way and I said: hell.

Q: Yes.

A: ...it's time that you feel guilty: everybody that participated, the Germans, the...all Europeans, and all over the world. You should feel guilty for what was done to me.

Q: Completely right.

A: It is your responsibility.

Q: Yes. I agree absolutely with this.

A: And that was...this helped me, this kind of switch in myself, helped me to deal with it in a more rational way.

Q: No, but listen, I was not talking about Auschwitz, we will come to Auschwitz later on, I was talking about the ghetto and.....Is it possible to say that...these people of the administration or the police anjoyed special privileges or not? That they had for instance better food.

A: I don't think that mattered really. I really don't think so. I just think what you said, that the Lodz ghetto you found different than others. People from the...survivors of the Lodz ghetto you find different...

Q: yes.

A: ...prespective or something different about the people.

Q: Yes.

A: Searching for reason, I think one reason might be that... As you said, it was the longest lasting, best organized, most cut of from the world ghetto I think. You may agree talking to other people. In the other ghettoes there was... and I watched movies and read and so on, because it was not so well organized. There was a possibility for contact with others....

Q: With the outside world.

A: And after all, there was anti-Semitism, but I had Polish friends that were they available, they would help me. My

Neighbours. But they were in the same situation, they were presecuted, they were killed and so on. So it happene But what were in other places...There was a possibility so experience some helpfulness from the others. In Lodz it was,other than rare circumstances, impossible for the ninety nine percent of more of the population. I was a com lete cut off. We felt completely jailed, like a Sing Sing, if you want to compare. Sing Sing is worse than an other jail, because it is so isolated and so on. The highest security or what. You know those...And we were put,I think,...the Lodz ghetto was one of the worst high security jail, as far as ghettoes go, I think that produced the higher degree of bitterness in us than maybe others that you came in contact with.

Q: Yes.

A: When there were holes....the Warsaw ghetto, you know, sewers, holes in the barbed wire, you could escape, you could get killed - I would get killed, but somebody else would go out and get contact.

Q: Yes. And there was the uprising too in the...

A: What?...yes. But not in the ghetto.

Q: Not in...

A: Not in Lodz. It was sort of hermetically sealed.

Q: Yes, but it was high security too because the Jews ~~ix~~ participated themselves in this...

A: ...with a such stiff government. The Jews. Right? I don't know....

Q: The machinery....

Aa: The machinery was so developed...

Q: The machinery of the ghetto was a tool for the extermination. Is it possible to say this?

A: Well, there were...on all Judenrat you can look as tools, or you can say there was no other choice. If they wouldn't ....Maybe Rumkowski was right.

Q: Okay.....You didn't talk about this.

A: hm...

37

BIR 11

BOBINE 360
Biren Panama City 11

A: Yes, we were talking about the Judenr...how I feel about the Judenraete. In a way you can say, and we felt, that they were a tool for extermination, for the Germans, because the orders came through the Judenraete. But also, in a way you can say that they were tools, that we hoped, and they, the people involved, hoped to be a tool for survival, to help as many people as possible to survive. I think that is why we did go along, the population in Lodz. Because once, there was no other choice, but the hope was that with the orderly conduct of things the idea was to save most lives, and to survive themselves.
Q: Yes. But it is an agonizing choice.
A: Except that there was no choice.
Q: Do you think...
A: In the last analysis, there was no choice. If Rumkowski wouldn't agree, they would find somebody else. Or if we would...Okay, you can say you could revolt. But the circumstances were not there, because it was so hermetically closed, there was no chance. As I said, you know, this was a high security jail. If the chances to get out are very small, people submit more.
Q: Yes. The most astonishing thing is that...to learn that life went on. I mean, there were even marriages which were performed at the veryend of the existence of the ghetto.
A: Sure. Child...Children were born too.
Q: And Rumkowski was the one who celebrated the marriages as a matter of fact at the end. Yes?
A: I don't know. It's possible.
Q: He concentrated all the power within his hands.
A: I don't know, if there was not a rabbinate. I don't know. I can't tell.
Q: No. there was no more...there was no rabbinate any more.
A: So he was preforming the marrigges. Okay. Well, you can look at it two ways. One, how horrible, how can you live under these circumstances. And the other way you can look at it: how strong life is. How much people want and need and do live as much as normally as they can. I suppose that not for this drive, nobody would survive.

Q: Yes. You told me once that you...you witnessed hangings in...in Lodz.

A: ahm. Well. If we are talking about tools, I think that was the biggest tool the Germans used.

Q: The German...?

A: The German used. The biggest tool to install deadly fear in the people, like hangings. They would catch people for whatever minor things and would make it publically in the...on the square. And people....They would gather people to watch and people in the offices, for there were offices around, had to watch in the windows. The Germans had to see the faces of people in the windows to make sure that we are watching.

Q: Did you see this yourself?

A: I did.

Q: Several times?

A: A couple of times that I remember for sure.

Q: Yes, and...

A: That was the deadly fear. That was a tool. That, Torture, death, horror. That was

Q: And is it true that the hanger was a Jew?

A: Who?

Q: I don't know the name....the hangman.

A: The hang....They were Jews. The person that was hanged?

Q: No, no.

A: The hangman?

Q: Yes.

A: Of course. Why not?

Q: Yes. Why not.

A: He was forced. Maybe he volunteered. Who knows? How about other hangmen, not in the ghetto?

Q: Yes. And the...the liquidation of the ghetto, how did it happen?

A: August 44. I went. 24th of August. There...I don't know the date but it was either July or August of 44, finally the order came that the ghetto is liquidated. Everybody has to go. And what can I tell you?

Q: Did the people consent without protest or were there

protests?

A: I don't know. People were going, by streets, by districts They were just....you know, SS men came and....

Q: in an orderly fashion?

A: More or less. I...I sort of....yes, in an orderly fashion The idea was to...mind you, sort of on two levels. We were told that we were...are being transported to another camp and that it will be good. To be sure to take the necessities, to be sure to take silverware and things like that, that we are going to be okay. And some people. ...I think the majority of people at that time, at the end, have believed it, and they just were going. But mind you, there were...they were totally exhausted.

Q: Physically?

A: Physically and morally. I didn't believe...I didn't believe for a minute we are going to survive...and said so. Then, Rumkowski had a sort of, in a way, here the privileges came again, he made a privileged list of people to go to a special camp. Who believed at that point anything? But all of us that graduated from high school in the graduating class girls could go with that special transport. And it was agony because who was to believe Rumkowski? or anything coming through Germans? - that there would be a special camp. So I didn't. And then I of course asked my parents what to do. And they...by that time they were totally1..they couldn't. They didn't know what to do...So they said: Well, whatever you think. You make the decisions. My parents were not like that, before. But at that point it was impossible.

Q: You were the one who made....

A: They put it in my hands to make a decision. So I enquired about the transport and looked around and the night it had to go I went to the....

Q: But did you have a choice or not?

A: Well, yes. I had a choice not to go and hide. And I said: well, I will hide. We will hide. So I said: okay, my decision: I am not going voluntarily. We'll hide. They will have to take me. So we did not go. And we were

trying to hide somewhere, but in the party there were not many people with me that could hide. We were not prepared, we dould not dig something where....you know, people where rallied to go to the trains. So we hid for a while, and then eventually the Germans came and took us, yes. There wasnaz was no place to hide other than be shot - and peopel were shot. So....

Q: And did Rumdowski himself go with this special transport?

A: Here it was another transport, I think. I don't recall. I did find out later, much later, that a special transport did go to Theresienstadt, and that was a much better way to go...

Q: Oh yes.

A: ....than Auschwitz. So youcan imagine that...that what I went through. It was my decision not to go there. And woul....what would be if I decided differently. Maybe somebody would survive.

Q: This means that you went to Auschwitz.

A: Aham.

Q: With you family?

A: Yes.

Q: And?

A: And we arrived in Auschwitz. What do you want me to say?

Q: And they were, your parents were....

A: My...They seperated the men from the women right away. So my father was in the other....seperate way. And my sister myself and my mother went together. My mother was taken away at the line, the womens' line. Left right. She was taken waway and that was it. Myself and my sister made...made it to the camp.

Biren 41

Q: This means your parents were gassed?

A: Ahm. No. I had...my father was sent to a camp, a labour camp, where he lived for a while

BOBINE 361

Biren Panama City 12

Q: How, How were the streets in the ghetto? They were clean? They were....In Warsaw it was not clean at all.

A: Very clean. There was a adminis...administrative apparatus to to take care of them. We had administrators for Blocks...as a matter of fact my father was the administrator of the Block within the ghetto. And he was responsible for everything being kept in order, which included clean streets and clean houses and latrines to be cleaned and chlored to prevent epidemics - typhoid fever and so on....

Q: But were there corpses in the street...

A: No.

Q: ...like in Warsaw?

A: No. There were sometimes people dying and falling on the street from hunger, but there were corpses left around.

Q: There was hunger and there was cleanliness.

A: Right.

Q: I have heard that there was once a...a strike of the grave-diggers, the people who were....

A: Yes. burriers. yes.

Q: ....were making the graves and it was a very important one, because the people were dying so...so numerous that this was a key...a key point in the machinery, this strike. Do you remember this?

Biren 42

A: Not really, no.

Q: Were there epidemics?

A: Oh...I don't think...there were people who were sick, of cours Hunger was the biggest sort of thing, of illness, swellings and so forth. And there were...there were dysentery and typhoid. But it was contained. It never took big proportions.

Q: It was under control.

A: It was under control. Medical care and sanitation - it was looked after. I am not saying it was and all that, but considering the , considering the hunger, it was as it was.

Q: And was it possible to work a whole day in a....hunger?

A: Very hard. I was young. But it was hard. I remember a period of time I worked in a wood working factory. There were...we were making all kinds of.....wheels for instance for wagons, wooden wheels, and other things. And it was a place. wintertime, it was not heated. So it was very very cold. We had to bundle up and so on. And we stood at the machineries. There was machinery...one machine xfxxx I operated. And it was...it was hard. But amazing. People were just sort of very very depressed.

Q: But I would like to ask you; whse these people who were working hard work, were they privileged in comparison with the others or not?

A: With others who?

Q: That didn't work.

A: That didn't work?

Q: Yes.

BIR 12

A: Well, you see, at one point everybody had to work. You got... the money that you got was not much. You were buying g food rations, food with it, vegetables and bread and so on.

Q: With Rumkowski currency?

A: That's right. And served the purpose then. You know, the currency, ghetto currency was buying food for the food stamps. Now, of course there was black market, but those were starvation diets, right. It was hard to live on it. And there was black market, but it was very....

Q: Who were the people who were organizing the black market?

A: The....who knows? People that worked probably at the food markets where food was received..

Q: Yes.

A: ...and they would then sell...

Q: It didn't come from outside?

A: I don't know. I doubt it. There was very little from the outside. Not that I know at any rate. It was coming from us. The black market ware was coming from our rations. So there was great bitterness about it, that our own people are eating off of us, so to speak.

Q: Yes?

A: But the work, I don't know. Like working there, it was bad, but I had my group of people, like myself, friends, and well, then you sat down and had the soup once a day that we would get at work and talk on, help each other and...

Q: And...

: Comeradery - that kept you alive. Home, family and comeradery.

Q: The love, did it exist inside the ghetto?

A: Of course.

BIR12

Q: Yes?

A: ahm...that people were dating, in love? Of course.

Q: Why do you just say of course and no more?

A: I am surprised at the question.

Q: No. This means that I cannot understand what is the life ins a ghetto. That's all. And it's true. It is very difficult.

A: It is very difficult, but you see there were times when for instance more peace was than others. The Aussiedlungen would come periodically and worse and worse. The first period of time while it was, as I have described before hard, there was family life. You know, people cared for each other, struggled together. The family ties....it was peculiar. either it got very bad, because if there was bad...families were just disintegrated. But the good family, the strong families helped each other. We were struggling together, and we were needing that help. Because when you got a ration for a week that you could eat in one sitting, okay, portional breat that should last a whole week, you could really eat it up at one sitting, it amounted to so little. Your had to space it for the whole week. And if a family couldnt, they got in trouble. Hunger more affects.....So you had to live like that and help each other. My family did it, we did it. So, there were strong ties, strong demands of each other, to help each ot er and go on.

Q: But there wereperiods of relative quietness?

A: And periods that you sort of learned to live with it, and enjoyed the family life or love, you know, romances. Young people and others. And that was natural and also helped to go on with life, to give some ray of hope and some good

~~fexing~~

feelings to people.

Q: And do you understand the Holocaust or does it remain a mystery for you?

A: It remains a mystery. Sometimes I hear from friends that are.. real friends. Either we talk a little bit and then I hear a saying: But you know, it has happened before in history. People would disappear in massacres and kill each other. And then I just clam up and I can't talk, and I say: Yes, maybe you're right. But of course that is not just the question. Because even if it did happen in history, here I am, it happened to me. And I cannot understand. So I don't need any comparison was...that did it ever happen or did things happen worse. Its irrelevant. Deep down it's irrelevant. What is irrelevant that I don't understand what happened.

Q: You still don't?

A: And I don't understand what was even worse, that after I came back to Poland and didn't think of leaving the country. I came back after Auschwitz and didn't know what I think. I hoped in my fantasies that I will find a home, hoped that somebody would come back, knowing better that it is not so. But then, the Poles didn't want to look at me, and said: get lost, get out of here. This I couldn't understand.

Q: It's what they said?

A: Yes.

Q: You couldn't have settled in Poland?

A: No, the pogroms started again. Theyx were killing Jews. That's why I left, not because...

Q: After the extermination?

A: That's right. 46.

Biren 46

Q: And what are your feelings towards Europe living in the United States now?

A: Yes, I do. Towards Europe: that I couldn't wait to get out after the war. I still was forced to live in Germany...not forced, but I went to Germany, went to medical school there while waiting for a visa anywhere. That was another pleasure, to sit there and have no place to go. I think it was very demorilizing for Jews, and for others too. And so I couldn't wait to get out of that place. And after years now, when I came back, I visited Europe recently, I think: what a pain. I belong there. That's my country. That's where I was raised. and the good youth...

B

BOBINE 362

Biren Panama City 13

A: I consider Europe my continent, and I feel that I was banned from there, firstly from Poland, first by the Germans, then by the Poles, together.

Q: Banned, banned?

A: Yes. Not that I ran away, but that I was banned. And that's the pain. Because it is my country. Poland is my country. I was raised with that feeling. And that was my country for many mmny ages. I don't know, but the Gu[illegible] over family tree - my son asked me about family tree - and I am lost. Because I have never considered that. I knew that my anscestors were there for ages and ages. Didn't care when they came. It was like ever back. Deeply rooted. And that was taken away.

Q: You speak Polish?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Fluently.

A: Oh sure. It was my mother tongue. I have forgotten much

of it, which is also a pain.

Q: And it is so difficult, so hard to imagine after the return, you returned to Poland after four years of ghetto and Auschwitz, you faced again the Polish anti-Semitism. Can you explain it?

A: I can't. That's a mystery.

Q: But did you experience it for yourself, or...it is true, there were progroms in 1946....

A: That's right. I left in 1946 after the pogroms.

Q: Did you experience it for yourself?

A: No, no. But I had friends in a little next to...in a small town in Poland next to Lodz, and I was visiting. And they sleeping with guns in fear because things were happening. So I was very close to it.

Q: Which town?

A: Lask.

Q: Lask. I know it. And it is the time you decided to go. But you would have agreed to live in Poland, even knowing there were no Jews anymore in Poland, that...

A: There were...

Q: ...that three million Jews, three million Polish Jews had been killed?

A: But there were Jews in Lodz. Many returned. Not many, but a number returned. And the hope was that you will return and that you will be welcome, that the...that's your home, that's your country, you know, that's your home. After all those years of suffering, that somebody would say: stay, we want you, you're part of us, you belong. But the opposite happened. For what reason, why, I don't know. I cannot explain.

Q: You never returned to Poland since?

A: No. I wanted many times, but there is...what will I see? And the attitude I don't think changed through the years. In 66 there were expulsions over and over of Jews. Why? How can I face it? My grandparents are buried in Lodz and at one point I heard from somebody that visisted Poland, that they want to level off the cemetery, do away with the cemetery. Well, how can I return to that, to visit?

Q: When did they die, your grandparents?

A: My grandparents? My grandparents died in the ghetto quickly. They were elderly and within an couple of years....Withing a year my grandfather died, and my grandmother the next year.

Q: Ah, in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto.

(pause)

A: Well, sometimes people say: I wanted to get away. I wanted to get away from there. Maybe I said that...no, I don't think I ever said that. I didn't want to get away.

Q: You wanted to stay.

A: Yes. I consider that my turf, my ground. I think being banned is the worst thing that can happen to a person. It's hard to talk about it even. I hope you understand. I don't understand that. Do you?

Q: I think I do.

A: hm?

Q: I do.

A: You do?

Q: uhm.

A: How? Oh, how dodyou understand. You understand the feeling, but...but how do you ban people, why?

Q: Well...

A: What was the crime? What's my crime? You ban people sometimes